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Authority warns of more road deaths due to lax safety

Danger of complacency after a record 2008 – RSA chief

TIM O'BRIEN

THE NUMBER of people killed on the Republic's roads may start to rise again this year, as cash-starved motorists postpone changing their cars, delay essential servicing and put off replacing worn tyres.

After a year which saw the lowest number of road deaths on record, Road Safety Authority chief executive Noel Brett said the danger in 2009 was that "people would think the job was done".

Mr Brett said the recession and rising number of poorer quality vehicles, combined with potential cuts in budgets for road repairs, could be a lethal combination. He warned that road death figures had levelled off in 2003 after the introduction of penalty points, but rose sharply again in 2004.

Addressing the Oireachtas Com-

mittee on Transport yesterday, Mr Brett said he believed €10 million in funding for privatised speed cameras would be provided by Government, but warned it was "the only major initiative we have for implementation this year".

Mr Brett said if other initiatives – such as the reduction in drivers' blood alcohol levels – were to be suddenly approved by Government, there would not be time to implement them in 2009.

While the RSA had a reduced budget for 2009 – largely because money had been included in the past for additional driver testers – Mr Brett said it would manage. He said overall road safety was dependent on budgets of a wide range of State agencies, including the Health Service Executive, the Garda and local authorities.

The RSA, he said, was trying to persuade the HSE to maintain a national trauma register "as other countries do", so a problem of under-reporting could be addressed. He said the cost of each road death had been estimated by Goodbody Economic Consultants at €3 million, while serious injuries, which were more numerous, cost €386,000.

Mr Brett said much still needed to be done, and he referred to the tragic death of three teenage boys in Co Tipperary on New Year's Eve



Dale Farm Travellers camp near Basildon, Essex. Jean Sheridan and daughter Viveanna (2) and her 2-month-old triplet boys, is one of up to 60 families facing eviction from the site after a ruling in the British High Court. Photographs: Oli Scarff/Getty Images and Sean Dempsey/PA

Essex Traveller families face eviction

FRANK MILLAR and PAMELA NEWENHAM

UP TO 60 Traveller families including an estimated 150 children are facing eviction from their homes at Dale Farm in Essex following a ruling by the Court of Appeal.

The court ruled in favour of Basildon District Council, reversing an earlier High Court ruling quashing a council decision to take direct action to force compliance with enforcement notices over the Green Belt land in Billericay. Lord Justice Pill said High Court judge Mr Justice Collins had been "in error" in ruling that the council had failed to consider the position of the individual families.

Speaking to *The Irish Times* last night, Dale Farm spokesman Grattan Puxon said "the women

here are very much in shock and in tears, the men are very defined and determined to protect Dale Farm, physically, if necessary".

Mr Puxon warned that a forced eviction could result in "a very brutal confrontation", adding "Dale Farm will be establishing their own defences, using several kilometres of barbed wire, scaffolding and iron gates".

Reacting to the decision, Andrew Ryder, national policy officer with the Irish Travellers Movement in Britain, said "what is alarming is the prospect of being evicted without a place to go".

Looking at past situations, people end up on the side of the road, which has a negative impact on their access to services and their health, he added.

Local Parish Priest, Fr John Glynn, said he was standing by the

people of Dale Farm, and would be supporting them "against the aggressive tactics of the council".

"These are my parishioners, they are part of the parish and they come to church, an alternative place should be provided for them, and that's what I'm objecting to".

Mary-Ann McCarthy, who is being evicted from the site with her seven children and 16 grandchildren, told *The Irish Times* "I'm just gutted". Her daughter Kathleen added "all of us have to go and I don't know where we'll go as we have no where to go, we'll end up on the side of the road".

Ms McCarthy said she was especially concerned for those among them who are old or sick, including one woman who had given birth to triplets just six weeks ago.

Some of the families living at the Dale Farm site first settled there in the 1960s and it has been an official settlement for some 40 families. More and more travellers subsequently settled at the site without permission, and also at the nearby Five Acres Farm.

Basildon Council voted in May 2005 in favour of enforcement notices to remove an estimated 1,000 people without planning permission for their caravans. Council leader Malcolm Buckley last night suggested the Travellers should accept that planning procedures were at an end and move on of their own accord.

"Nobody wants a forced eviction," he told Sky News.

John Wadham, group legal director for the Equality and Human Rights Commission, expressed disappointment with

the outcome of the case. He said that while the Court had recognised Basildon Council had to assess the impact of their policies on the Traveller community, the commission did not share the view that they did this properly.

"We are very concerned that this ongoing legal dispute has created a distressing situation for the Travellers at Dale Farm and for local residents," said Mr Wadham. "We urge the council to carefully and compassionately consider the welfare of the estimated 150 traveller children who now face eviction from their homes."

He also said the commission would like to help the council bring all sides together and offer guidance in weighing legal obligations to the Traveller community with the need to maintain planning controls.

In short

Relatives to receive report on Stardust

■ Relatives of the Stardust fire victims are to receive a report on the fire this afternoon. They will be presented with a copy of the file at Government buildings.

The report by Paul Coffey SC looks at the State's examination of a case for a reopened inquiry into the disaster. Forty-eight young people died in the 1981 Stardust nightclub inferno in north Dublin.

The report was given to the Government on December 16th and referred to the Attorney General for legal advice.

Four relatives held a three-day sit in at Government buildings last week in order to get a date for the release. They had expected to be given a copy before Christmas and wanted it before the 28th anniversary of the fire on February 14th.

Antoinette Keegan, a spokeswoman for the Stardust Victims Committee who lost her sisters Martina and Mary in the blaze, told *The Irish Times* she was "relieved".

Dublin Transport Authority this year

■ The Dublin Transport Authority is likely to be fully established and functional by the middle of this year, the Minister for Transport Noel Dempsey said last night.

The department has placed an advertisement in newspapers this morning seeking a chief executive for the authority.

The setting up of the authority has been long-mooted but the most significant move towards setting it up came when the Act establishing the transport authority was passed by the Oireachtas earlier this year.

Mr Dempsey told *The Irish Times* last night that the authority being set up would lead to the overdue reform of the 1982 Transport Act.

Fatal collisions

■ The cost of each fatality, as reckoned by Goodbody Economic Consultants is €3 million. Each serious injury is estimated to cost €386,000.

■ The number of cases where penalty points remain